

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.

THE HEALTH OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

I.—General.

II.—Eyes and the eye-sight.

III.—The care of the teeth.

IV.—Mouth-breathing, enlarged tonsils
and adenoids.

V.—Discharging ears.

VI.—Ringworm.

VII.—Personal cleanliness.

I.—GENERAL.

Medical Inspection of Children at School.—Local Education Authorities are obliged by law to provide for the medical inspection of children at certain periods during their school life. The London County Council hopes that whenever possible one of the parents will arrange to be present at the inspection.

Medical Treatment.—Parents will realise how important it is that ailments discovered by the school doctor should receive prompt attention. In many cases it will be possible to take the children to their own medical practitioner. To meet the cases where parents find this impossible the Council has made special arrangements with various institutions and centres for the treatment of dental defects, tonsils and adenoids, visual defects, ringworm, minor ailments, etc. Further information on the subject will readily be given by the school care committee or the head teacher.

Fresh Air and Sunshine.—All children need plenty of *fresh air*, and it is very important that windows should be *kept open*, especially bedroom windows. *Sunshine* has a very favourable effect upon health and it should be admitted into every house as freely as possible.

Clothing.—In order that children may not suffer from draughts they should be well and suitably clothed. The underclothing should be of *wool*, and in winter the arms and legs should be covered as well as the body. It is important that too many garments should not be worn. Clothing should not be tight: garters, tight bands and corsets must not be worn. Vests worn during the day should not be slept in. *This is very important.* Special attention should be given to the footwear. Leaky boots are particularly dangerous.

Food and Meals.—Before the long school morning a *good breakfast* is necessary. The child should be up betimes to eat it. Indigestion is often caused by the habit of bolting the food. Teach children to eat slowly and to masticate their food thoroughly. A *good dinner* should await the children on their return from school at mid-day. Meals should

be taken at regular times, and supper, if given, should be light. As a rule, London children do not get enough milk, fruit and vegetables. Do not forget to include in the dinner menu every day one or more of the following *vegetables*: cabbage, lettuce, swedes, carrots and onions.

Do not let the children have too many sweets, nor let them be continually eating between meals.

Raw fruit is health giving, shop sweets are not; persuade the children to spend their pennies on fruit and not on sweets. Children should not drink too much tea.

Sleep.—Many children do not get enough *sleep*, especially in summer time, and consequently suffer in health. The bedroom must be kept *fresh* and *airy*. The window should always be *open* at least a little.

The bedclothes should be *warm* but not too *heavy*. Children aged 4 to 7 should have 11 to 12 hours sleep; while those aged 11 to 14 should have 9 to 10 hours. See, therefore, that children do not stay up too late or they will be heavy and stupid in the morning; and see that the younger the children are the *earlier* they go to bed.

Evening entertainments often produce unnatural excitement, and young children, as a rule, should not visit them. An excited child will not fall asleep.

Epidemics.—During epidemics of infectious diseases the attendance of children at parties, etc., should be avoided as far as possible, and children excluded from school on account of illness in the home must not attend Sunday schools, cinemas, swimming baths or play centres, or *play about* with other children in the street. Parents should inform the head teacher of the school immediately one of their children is ill. In this way they can help very considerably to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. It is especially necessary to let the teacher know at once if the child has a sore throat, a cold, cough, running nose or skin rash as it is only possible for the medical officer to take the necessary action to protect the other children if he has early knowledge of the existence of such illnesses.

II.—EYES AND THE EYE-SIGHT.

Bad eyesight interferes greatly with a child's progress in school, seriously diminishes the chances of success in later life, and increases the liability to accident. Parents are therefore requested to see that children do not habitually use their eyes for reading, sewing or other close work in a bad light at home. If the child complains often of headache the eyesight should be tested. If the school doctor finds that the eyesight is defective and that glasses are required, these should be procured. As it is necessary for medical applications to be used in testing the eyes for glasses, a doctor should always be consulted. It is the optician's work to supply the glasses, but the doctor prescribes. The school care committee will render every assistance if applied to.

When glasses are first worn the child sometimes finds difficulty in getting used to them and much patience is required to induce the child to persevere in using them. It is important that after glasses have been obtained the child should attend at the hospital or treatment centre, so that the oculist may see that the correct glasses have been supplied.

Squint.—Bad eyesight often leads to squint; this can generally be cured by glasses, provided advice is sought in time: failure to obtain advice may make it necessary for an operation to be performed. It is most important not to neglect a squint, as the squinting eye nearly always becomes completely or partially blind. Employers often will not engage workpeople who are blind in one eye, because of the risks under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Always have a squint attended to at once. To neglect the condition is cruelty to the child.

Sore Eyes.—Sore eyes are often due to bad health, want of cleanliness, or eye strain. The child may require spectacles, but these should be worn only when prescribed by a doctor. Sore eyes are sometimes due to ulcers on the eyeball. There is then danger, as the sight may be affected and the child may remain partially blind throughout his life. Never neglect an attack of sore eyes, and always follow very carefully the doctor's advice.

Blight.—When more than one child in the family suffers at the same time from an attack of sore eyes it is very likely to be due to blight. This is a contagious disease, and very quickly spreads from child to child. The children must not attend school until quite well. The eyes should be bathed very often in boracic lotion. This is made by putting a teaspoonful of boracic acid into a pint of warm water. Small pieces of clean rag or cotton wool should be used for bathing and should be burnt immediately after use. Pillow-cases should be washed. If the same towel or handkerchief is used by any one else, or if the affected child sleeps with others, the disease is certain to spread. The eyes should be washed in running water.

III.—THE CARE OF THE TEETH.

Health and strength and the capacity for earning full wages in after life depend largely upon the condition of the teeth. Decayed teeth lead to bad health, not only by causing indigestion, but also by slowly poisoning the body. In this way a strong man may become weakened gradually and at last be unable to earn a living merely through neglect of his teeth. In childhood the second teeth begin to appear at the back of the mouth at the age of six before any of the first teeth are lost, and they are often allowed to decay from neglect on the plea that they are only first teeth. It is of great importance to preserve these teeth as they will never be replaced. Mothers often think that it is not necessary to bother about the first teeth. This is a great mistake. The milk teeth especially need attention. If decay sets in it is difficult to stay it, and the decay will spread from the first teeth to the second teeth. Decay of the teeth is generally caused, firstly, by bad feeding, especially in early childhood, and, secondly, by food left sticking to the teeth after eating. The use of the toothbrush will do much towards preserving the teeth and ensuring health. Every child should have his own toothbrush, and be taught to use it night and morning. It is especially important that the teeth should be brushed the last thing at night. Children should never be given

biscuits, sweets or other food to take to bed with them. Food should not be bolted without chewing. This is very bad, in the first place, for the teeth. They get too little work to do. And, in the second place, it is bad for the stomach, for such great lumps of food go down into it that it is very hampered in its work. The habit of bolting food will surely cause ill health. If decay of the teeth has started take the child to a dentist. If you cannot afford a dentist ask the care committee at the school to help you. In the interests of your child do all you can to preserve the teeth. You would be wise to take your child to your dentist or the dental centre once every six months.

IV.—MOUTH-BREATHING, ENLARGED TONSILS AND ADENOIDS.

Children must be taught to breathe properly. The proper way to breathe is through the nose. *Every child should have its own pocket handkerchief* and be taught how to use it in order to keep the passages clear. Children who cannot keep their mouths shut or who snore at night should see the doctor.

Many children as a result of colds have growths behind the nose which block the passage. These growths are called adenoids. At the same time the tonsils may become enlarged. So long as the adenoids remain it is impossible for the child to breathe properly. This condition leads to very serious results. The chest is affected and does not develop as it should, so that consumption is more easily contracted later on. The child often becomes deaf or gets discharging ears, and also becomes dull at lessons. The digestion is interfered with, and the child becomes very unhealthy.

If, therefore, the doctor tells you the child has enlarged tonsils and adenoids, lose no time in getting the affection cured. The operation is a very simple one, and it is much better to get it over than to allow the child's health and schooling to continue to be interfered with by the growths.

After the operation care must be taken that the child learns to breathe properly through the nose, and *much patience* must be used to remove the bad habit of mouth-breathing

which has been learnt. It is particularly important that the bedroom window of the child who has suffered from adenoids should always be kept open, as a hot stuffy atmosphere greatly favours the development of this condition.

V.—DISCHARGING EARS.

Discharging ears are *dangerous* to life. They very often lead to inflammation of the brain. The sooner they are treated the easier the cure. If the discharge is allowed to go on long it will cause deafness. Even if it has lasted many years it may suddenly cause death by affecting the brain. These are the serious penalties which have to be paid for neglect of discharging ears, and very *heavy responsibility* rests on parents who fail to have proper treatment for these cases. Any parent who has a child with discharging ears will be at once helped to get the condition cured on application to the school. Ears often ache before they begin to discharge. Earache should receive immediate attention. Not a moment should be lost.

VI.—RINGWORM.

Children suffering from ringworm of the scalp are excluded from school, for ringworm may spread from contact with a suffering child.

The number of fresh cases of ringworm reported every year among school children in London is about two thousand.

These cases represent a great deal of worry and anxiety to parents. The children suffer also in another way; *they lose their time at school*; children with ringworm of the scalp are very frequently out of school for six months and longer, sometimes for years.

The London County Council has, therefore, undertaken to help parents to get a treatment called the X-ray treatment for school children suffering from this complaint.

Treatment by ointment and drugs has been disappointing: it is very slow and the cure is apt to be doubtful. Often children supposed to be cured by this means are found when they return to school still to be suffering.

Experience has shown that by X-ray treatment ringworm can be cured rapidly. This treatment as arranged for by the London County Council is always carried out by a trained operator, and every care is taken of the children.

The treatment is not dangerous or painful: after it is done the hair soon grows again and grows well, and by effecting a quick cure it has enabled children to go back to school after a short absence.

Parents are urged to use the facilities offered to them by the London County Council for curing and stopping the spread of ringworm among school children.

Application for X-ray treatment may be made to the School Nurse, School Attendance Officer, or the School Medical Officer.

VII.—PERSONAL CLEANLINESS.

Dirt leads to disease. To preserve the cleanliness of all the children in school they are regularly inspected by the school nurses. No parent should object to this, since it is the only means whereby clean children can be protected. Dirty children are a danger to others and will not be allowed to attend. *Daily washing* with soap and water is essential. Hands should be washed before meals. If a bath is not given, the feet, at least, should be bathed every day. Stockings and underclothing should be changed and washed every week. Finger and toe nails must be clean and neatly trimmed.

Hair.—The hair must be kept clean and well brushed. The presence of vermin in the hair or elsewhere is a cause of irritation, sores, swollen glands and other needless suffering which children ought not to have to bear.

In girls the hair must have attention every day. Long hair is best worn in plaits to keep it free from dirt. Short and clean hair is better than long and badly-kept hair. Boys suffer from nits and vermin to a very much less extent than girls, and the reason is that they always have short hair. Nits are a sign of neglect. The London County Council has made a rule that scholarships shall not be given to children who are constantly found to have nits in their hair.

To get rid of nits.—The hair should be soaked at night in paraffin and the head then wrapped in a cloth or towel. Next day the hair should be lathered thoroughly with a mixture made up by taking

1 oz. borax powder (about 6 teaspoonfuls),

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. soft soap (about a cupful),

Hot water, 1 quart (about 4 cupfuls).

This mixture should not be washed off for at least five minutes, after which, if a fine toothed metal comb is used, the nits will come off easily. If the hair is badly affected with nits, the quickest cure is to cut the hair short.]

[CAUTION.—Do not use paraffin near a fire or naked light or allow a child to go near a fire or naked light after the paraffin treatment.]

Very serious diseases are spread by lice. The presence of vermin on the body or clothing is a condition which must be immediately remedied. It is best when children get in this condition to seek the aid of the school nurse and have the children and their clothing treated at the bathing centre; at the same time the aid of the sanitary inspector in cleansing the home is necessary. Any grown-up people in the house who have unfortunately contracted the disease should at the same time be treated so as to get rid of the condition. (Particulars as to the disinfecting baths can be obtained at the school or at the Borough Council offices.)

Every assistance will be given to those who desire it; but if the children are neglected after warning and their condition is not quickly remedied steps will be taken by the Council under the Education Act, 1921, and if the children continue to be neglected the parents will be prosecuted.

The Itch (or Scabies).—This disease is due to a small insect which burrows under the skin. It is spread by contact or by handling things used by persons suffering. It begins generally between the fingers and on the wrists, and then spreads to other parts of the body. A child who scratches much and has sores in those situations most likely has the itch. A child in this condition of course must not attend

school. The child should be given a warm bath and washed all over with soft soap every night. Immediately after the bath sulphur ointment should be thoroughly rubbed into the affected parts. It is necessary to have clothing and bedding disinfected as well, and therefore anyone so unfortunate as to have contracted the disease should apply at the Borough Council offices for information about the public disinfecting baths. When a school child is affected application should be made to the head teacher, the school nurse or care committee at the school. If there are grown-up persons or children under school age at home suffering from the disease at the same time it is important that they should be treated.

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